

July 13, 2012

To: Transportation 2040 Plan Team

RE: Transportation 2040 *Draft Directions* (June 2012): Comments

1. Introduction and Overview

During the spring of 2012, the Vancouver City Planning Commission chose transportation as one of its priorities for 2012, because transportation is a key challenge in the future of the City; because the City is addressing that challenge with its Transportation 2040 plan; and because the Commission has expertise and energy to contribute to transportation planning. To focus on transportation, the Commission formed a Transportation Plan Committee which reviewed Transportation 2040 documents, related City documents, and other publications. The Committee also benefited from a lively and informative meeting with Planning and Engineering staff.

In this submission, the Commission:

- offers its comments on the Transportation 2040 *Draft Directions* document as a whole; and
- describes two specific concepts that the Commission and its Transportation Plan Committee propose to develop further, complementing the Transportation 2040 process.

2. Comments on the *Draft Directions*

Overall, the Commission commends and supports the Transportation 2040 *Draft Directions* document. The *Draft Directions* possess sound principles and a useful degree of detail. The Commission in particular supports the integration of transportation planning and land-use planning that is expressed in the *Draft Directions*.

The Commission encourages the addition of one element: a vision for pedestrianization with closure to motor vehicles of certain blocks on streets such as Robson and Denman in the West End. We recognize that many business owners question the favourable effect of pedestrianization on retail sales, as indicated by research in several cities. We believe that it would be an economic success in certain locations while also serving the need for greater walkability and public space.

3. Specific Concepts for Development by the Commission and its Transportation Plan Committee

The Committee is focusing on two concepts which are future-oriented and which are not fully developed in the *Draft Directions*. We recommend that the Transportation 2040 plan should include explicit commitment to the development of:

- city-wide network of “greenways” and “blueways” (defined in (4) below); and
- the Fraser River shoreline.

The Committee aims to further these two concepts or projects with its own work. While these two projects have some commonalities, they present different opportunities. Both projects will further green transportation and contribute to the Greenest City Action Plan. However, a network of greenways/blueways would be a “light” thematic overlay of existing transportation features. In contrast, a planning initiative to develop the Fraser River shoreline must tackle “heavy” re-structuring of land-use if it is to further the vision of public access to the riverfront by pedestrians, cyclists, boaters, and transit passengers.

4. A City-wide Network of Greenways and Blueways

The Commission seeks the City’s commitment to an ecological network of greenways/blueways that would build upon existing transportation features (including pedestrian and cycling routes, other rights-of-way, urban streams, and marine waterways).

We define greenways/blueways both as transportation linkages and as terrestrial or aquatic habitats, unique spaces in themselves. The City of Vancouver’s current definition of greenways is a subset of our definition.

The concept of a city-wide network of greenways/blueways enlarges upon the *Draft Directions* references to “providing a blueprint for great pedestrian realm design,” and “designing streets as a green network that contributes to the natural environment” (page 10), and includes specific features such as False Creek (page 21) and the Arbutus Corridor (page 43). A network of greenways/blueways also is congruent with the Greenest City Action Plan, and that plan’s first priority of converting rights-of-way to parks.

A greenways/blueways network would overlay existing features with an ecological theme, creating linear parks along transportation routes, and truly “greening” those corridors by improving bird habitat, restoring plant communities, and “daylighting” lost streams. This concept harmonizes the transportation priorities of walking and cycling with the Greenest City priority of access to parkland and nature. It is a concept that should be applied on an incremental basis whenever the City develops, modifies, or maintains a cycling route, pedestrian route, or waterway. In other words, such thinking should become embedded in the City’s planning efforts. The concept is attainable for all neighbourhoods and promotes the expansion of green space throughout the City. The concept also promotes ecological adaptation to climate change. By pursuing a city-wide network of greenways and blueways, Vancouver can become an international leader in the integration of urban transportation and urban ecology.

5. The Fraser River Shoreline

Integrated public access to Vancouver’s Fraser River shoreline is a compelling vision for the future of transportation and green-space in the City. Existing pedestrian and cycling routes could

be strengthened into a riverfront transportation corridor, with links to public transit. The Fraser shoreline also holds promise as a land and marine linear park serving many neighbourhoods – potentially, a stellar contribution to the Greenest City initiative.

This vision requires heavy planning work because the Fraser shoreline features contrasting land uses under the authority of all three levels of government. The Commission seeks the City's commitment to in-depth study of issues that are crucial to the Fraser shoreline, including:

- consolidated rights-of-way for cycling and walking;
- public access to the shoreline by transit and other modes, for multiple neighbourhoods;
- assessment of public water access, and public or private marine transportation;
- accommodation of industrial transportation (movement of goods) on the river and its bridges;
- integration of the Transportation 2040 and Greenest City initiatives with the City's strategies for industrial lands; and
- a case study of the implications of rising sea levels.

The Fraser shoreline concept enlarges upon the *Draft Directions* references to visions for an active transportation and greenway corridor along the river; to improving street network connections to the river; and to reviewing freight and passenger transportation on the river (page 44). The Fraser shoreline corridor is a prime opportunity to integrate transportation planning with land-use planning, given the diversity of land uses and tenures along the river. The corridor also is on the front line of climate change: the Fraser estuary is influenced not only by rising sea levels, but also by climatic changes in its upstream watersheds.

6. Conclusion

The Commission and its Transportation Plan Committee look forward to furthering these two concepts in co-operation with the Planning and Engineering Departments.



Peter Greenwell, Chair, on behalf of
The Vancouver City Planning Commission

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